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MONTHLY LETTER

Devoted to Spiritual and Philosophical Problems -- by Manly P. Hall

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Dear Friend:

In this letter we shall continue the discussion of the theme of last month's article, namely: "Contacting sources of spiritual instruction." This month we are to consider Nature as the textbook of the divine law.

Those among the initiated pagans who venerated Nature as the visible manifestation of the eternally existing Universal Principle, were termed Pantheists—worshippers of Pan or Nature. In the Middle Ages Pantheism continued in the philosophies of the Alchemists, the Hermetists, and the Illuminati, members of these groups referring to themselves as Pan-Sophists or philosophers wise in the mysteries of Universal Nature.

It must not be supposed that the hierophants of Greek and Egyptian metaphysics taught their disciples a blind veneration for natural force, or sought to incline the minds of novices merely to the worship of external forms. Pantheism is not the worship of material nature but rather an effort to discover the true nature of divinity through an examination of those material consequences which are constantly flowing from the inscrutable center of the Universal One.

In his vision of the divine magnificence, Mohammed describes the innumerable veils which conceal the features of eternal Truth. As it is impossible for any man to behold God face to face, even the wisest must be content to gaze upon the innumerable veilings which obscure the splendid countenance of Being.

The pagans regarded divinity as the Great Architect. The material universe itself is described by the pagan philosophers as one of the noblest works of Divine Intellect. By coming to understand, to respect, even to adore Nature, the wisest of the ancients declared that they perceived more completely that splendid Reason which conceived the world and that vast Wisdom which maintains all things.

Paracelsus of Hohenheim, one of the last of the medieval philosophers, and one of the first thinkers of the modern world, called Nature the great textbook of Divine Mysteries. For the greater part of his short but eventful life Paracelsus wandered the by-ways of Europe gathering knowledge from the great storehouse of primitive fact. One of his mottoes was: "He who would study the book of Nature must walk its pages with his feet." Nature is the unalterable factor in what many people feel to be a man-made world. Nature is inevitable. Nature is the divine criterion of all merit and demerit. By the mysterious processes of Nature we come into being; by equally mysterious processes we are preserved and perpetuated for a certain time; and in the end by these same mysterious processes we depart from this theatre of physical action. In our every thought and act we are utterly dependent upon natural munificence. Men are constantly building up and tearing down the various institutions which together constitute the pageantry of empire; but all men, great and small, all enterprises, vast and humble, all processes, noble and ignoble,

are circumscribed by a vast natural design from the boundaries of which they can never for an instant escape.

When men study the words of men they gain a certain knowledge of passing things. Books are filled with opinions, and very often these opinions are limited in their usefulness to certain generations and decades. Nature, however, propounds inevitables. The book of Nature sets forth unchanging principles before which all human ingenuity must bow. Men can resist Nature for a little time, but in the end natural law is ever victorious.

To the philosopher, Nature is the instrument of a benevolent conspiracy. All the innumerable factors which together constitute the diffusion of Nature are active agencies of the Divine Purpose. The Divine Law and the Divine Mind supporting Nature are the agencies of an all-sufficient purpose. It is not given to man to fully understand this purpose, but to some men the magnitude of the Plan is at least dimly perceptible. Such men we term wise, for wisdom really is the perception of the plan of Being. He who understands the Plan becomes to some measure aware of the Planner. As the Hermetists said, "We perceive the Workman through the Works."

Students of mystical philosophy will never be without a sufficient inspiration while the panorama of Nature unfolds about them. False doctrines will come and go and many will be deceived thereby. There will be false gods and false prophets capturing the minds of the uninformed. There will be false gospels and false books to lead astray the credulous. These morbid times are full of falacies. Yet, in the midst of all this confusion, no sincere and earnest disciple of the old doctrines need feel that the quest for truth is hopeless. The Ancient Wisdom, though so often perverted and obscured, remains evident and attainable so long as Nature endures. The Secret Doctrine is written in the sky, the most profound mysteries of Universal Law are revealed in the structure of leaf, flower and seed. A man cast away upon a desert island could restore the Secret Doctrine from a grain of sand did he possess the keys to accomplish this seeming miracle.

The Egyptians worshipped Nature in the form of the goddess Isis. They represented her as concealed by numerous veils, her body adorned with curious hieroglyphs. To the Greeks she was Kore or Ceres, the mother of the Eleusinian Mysteries. She was the mysterious Diana of the Ephesians. To Christendom she is Mary, the Virgin Mother of the Messianic Incarnation. Always she is the source of that moral nutriment by which the well-being of the human soul is assured.

It is natural for man to overlook the obvious. Men have made so many legislations in the last few thousand years that they seem to have forgotten the inevitability of natural law. Civilization, verging towards empire, has ignored the laws governing that very earth from which civilization has reared itself. Man, the child, has forgotten Nature, the parent. He has built a tower of Babel where he should have erected a temple to the Universal Mystery. By this building he has achieved only to a confusion of tongues when he should have attained to a universal concord.

On a certain occasion Socrates was walking with some disciples along a busy thoroughfare in Athens. The old stoical philosopher was beginning a discourse and one of his disciples, fearing that the confusion of the street would distract his master, said to him, "Before you begin this teaching let us seek a place suitable for instruction." Instantly Socrates replied, "The place where thou art is always suitable for instruction." This incident has great significance for the modern truth-seeker. In ancient Athens various teachers had groves and squares and other retreats in and about the city. Plato preferred the Lyceum, Aristotle the race-track at the Gymnasium. Plato always taught while sitting, Aristotle, while walking, and Diogenes talked only while in his tub. Socrates aimed his remarks against the opinion that various places had special virtue, that men were nearer to God or Truth in one place than another, and that divine concerns could only be spoken of in shrines or temples. To Socrates, philosophy was so essentially an inner mystery of consciousness that he is famed for the declaration: "Wherever a man desires to know, that is the place proper for his education; whenever he desires to know, that is the time proper for his instruction."

In the modern world the study of the various departments of Nature has become the proper field of science. A number of "exact" sciences have been established and developed whereby phenomena are classified and the various forces at work throughout Nature cataloged and examined. Science has accumulated a vast body of formal knowledge and anyone desirous of understanding the complicated workings of the material universe can realize his desire by applying himself to one or more of the sciences. Astronomy will reveal to him the mechanics of the heavens; geology, the formation of the earth; anthropology, the origin and development of the human race. No philosopher will deny the significance of the body of knowledge amassed by science.

Philosophy differs from science, however, chiefly in the matter of the conclusions arising from this accumulated mass of physical knowledge. SCIENCE READS THE BOOK OF NATURE BUT DOES NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT IT READS. All too often, therefore, profundity of scientific learning inclines to atheism or, at least, to a morbid agnosticism. The mechanistic theory in science, which views the whole universal process as a sort of perpetual motion device, is an utterly insufficient explanation of existence and its laws. If scientists could only realize that the knowledge which they have accumulated is not complete in itself but depends upon the metaphysical philosophies of the ancients for its interpretation, they would be rescued from the numerous uncertainties which now beset them.

The mystery of divinity comprehends three other mysteries as aspects of itself. God, as Nature, is visibly manifested through a diversity of phenomena. God, as Thought, is infinitely diffused as the reason in all things. God, as Spirit, is the hidden power which sustains all things, as intrinsic life. We perceive God without as Nature, God within as Self, and the very faculty with which we perceive is itself divine and acts as a mediator between its own extremes.

Philosophy is not itself a body of knowledge but rather an interpreter of knowledge. Knowledge does not actually become fact, philosophically speaking, until its relationship with the divine Whole

has been demonstrated. That, which is perceived by the senses, is Nature. Nature contemplated by the mind reveals its processes and procedures. These in turn, comprehended by the inner Self, become wisdom.

No true and enlightened system of philosophy will ever depart from the laws of Nature. The ancient philosophers described the vast body of Nature as supported upon an intricate structure of law. In Thibet, the Lamas say that the material creation is upheld upon a foundation of crossed thunderbolts. These thunderbolts symbolize the dynamic agencies of cosmic process. By the Egyptians the planets were regarded as divine Beings, focal points of cosmic energy and universal law. Following their astro-philosophical theory, we can associate planets and laws according to the following arrangement:

1. Neptune: Periodicity. Existence is divided into cycles and sub-cycles measured by the recurrences of certain celestial phenomena. Neptune as the slowest moving of the planets, requiring the greatest time to complete his revolution, became emblematic of the standard of all cyclic and periodic return. As the ancients expressed it, "All things have beginnings, midmost states, and ends." Also all ends are beginnings and all beginnings are ends. In India, the cosmic cycles of time, in which worlds, continents, races and empires rise and fall, are termed KALPAS and YUGAS. By the Greeks, they are termed Ages. The whole creative process is supported upon a framework of inconceivable time and duration factors.

2. Uranus: Alternation. Throughout the entire universal procedure the law of alternation is constantly at work. All natures pass from one extreme to another and in the course of this pendulum-like swing, go through a numerous complexity of experiences. By alternation of the earth's poles all parts of the planet's surface are going through constant climatic modification. Through alternation of sex in reincarnation, the human soul swings gradually from one cycle of experience to another. Every condition which arises in society breeds its opposite. Every intemperance inclines towards an opposite intemperance. Existence is a vast ever-swinging

pendulum moving backward and forward with the ebb and flow of the cosmic tide.

3. *Saturn: Cause and Effect.* In the Mysteries, Chronos or Saturn was regarded as the cruelest and most unforgiving of divinities, devourer of his own children. He represents the immutability of the cosmic plan and in no way is this immutability more evident than in the law of cause and effect, from which there can be no deviation of any kind—a law without exception, compromise or modification. “As ye sow, so shall ye reap,” says the Christian Scriptures. “Effect follows cause as the wheel of the cart follows the foot of the oxen,” says the Buddhist Canons. Yet this law, though apparently so severe, is in reality the most kindly and just of edicts, for it insures that in good, as well as in evil, that which a man earns shall inevitably come to him.

4. *Jupiter: Evolution.* The law of evolution may be defined as the expanding of natures from within themselves, outwardly. Jupiter was the god of growth and expansion. Evolution is unfoldment. It is the externalizing of internal divinity. It is God growing up in forms and causing these forms to increase their own dimensions that they may be adequate for the truth growing up within them. Every form in nature is evolving and by evolution is returning again to its own source—the infinite perfection within which it was originally individualized. Evolution is the process of becoming ever more sufficient to the need of that energy resident within the evolving form.

5. *Mars: Karma.* The law of Karma is in some respects to be differentiated from Cause and Effect. Cause and Effect as governed by Saturn is entirely impersonal, that is, it transcends the moral value. Karma, or the law of compensation, is Cause and Effect applied directly to man or to a self-motivating moral agent. Karma comes into manifestation with the development of the conscious mind. Nature never chooses to do evil because it is ruled completely by law. Man, possessing the power to choose to do that which is wrong, creates thereby Karma, which takes the form of Cause and Effect as a medium of punishment or retribution. Thus, Mars becomes the devil, punishing misdeeds. Sa-

turn's law of Cause and Effect infers no element of punishment, merely inevitable ebb and flow.

6. *Sun: Reincarnation.* The annual birth, death and resurrection of the Sun causes it to be the proper symbol of the luminous Ego of man which moves from body to body in the mystery of Reincarnation. Rebirth is the law of evolution applied to the Self within man, which, surviving disintegration of the physical form, builds nobler mansions and lives on through the ages in new bodies suitable to its needs.

7. *Venus: Harmony and Rythm.* Nature, in the achievement of her inevitable ends, moves gloriously and directly, never for a moment deviating from the certainty of her course. Causes flow into effects with a majesty and beauty, and all of Nature's processes have about them a grace and harmonious rythm. The ancients, therefore, declared that Nature's way being the absolute standard of beauty, all creatures should cultivate harmony and rythm as attributes of the divine nature.

8. *Mercury: Equilibrium.* In the old books of the Cabbalists it is written that all unbalanced forces perish in the Void. Unbalance leads to destruction. Equilibrium or poise conserves resource and achieves permanence. Mercury as mind is the reconciler of opposites. He who achieves balance achieves power. Equilibrium is an immovable foundation upon which to build an enduring structure of thought and action. All extremes must be overcome. Equilibrium is immortality.

9. *The Moon: Generation.* All egos entering into the physical universe must obey the law of generation. All material forms are created according to the patterns and principles peculiar to what Plato termed the generating sphere. At this stage of evolution the law of generation infers that all bodies must be built according to one law or pattern. This is the celebrated Forty-seventh Proposition of Euclid. Man himself, termed in China the child of heaven and earth, is the progeny of the first pair of opposites—spirit and matter.

10. *The Earth:* In the old philosophies the earth had no law peculiar to it but was the laboratory in which the nine laws manifest themselves in

infinite combinations. The material universe is really the embodiment of law. The laws of Nature are the impulses resident in the Divine Intellect manifesting as the movers of atoms and builders of worlds.

When the student grasps the mystical significance of these laws, he has established his philosophy upon a permanent and sufficient foundation.

Yours very sincerely,

Manly P. Hall

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

QUESTION—Is theology the same as religion?

ANSWER—We like to distinguish distinctly between the term theology and the term religion. By theology we like to understand any organized system of dogma, creed, ceremonial, ritual and sacrament constituting an ecclesiasticism. By religion we like to understand man's inner urge to venerate the beautiful, serve the good and see God in everything. When a religion is crystallized and organized into a sect and divides itself from the beliefs of other men, it becomes a theology. The great World Teachers brought philosophical and religious revelation which gradually became instituted and established as theological systems. Man is naturally a religious animal, but he is a theological animal only by heredity and environment. There is only one religion in the world but there are many theologies which have risen up as competitive organizations, each claiming to be holier than the other. Take for example Christianity. The Christian religion consists of two commandments: to love God and to love one another. The simple living of these two commandments constitutes Christianity as a religion. In the last nineteen hundred years hundreds of sects have risen, many of them greatly complicated and having elaborate systems and sta-

tutes of observances. Today we have over two hundred sects in Christendom, all more or less competitive and greatly divided. These are theologies. To the degree that a spiritual revelation is complicated and divided, to that degree it becomes theological. To the degree that it remains simple and united, to that degree it remains religious.

QUESTION—We have a three-year-old daughter. What religious training do you recommend?

ANSWER—Small children, too young to understand any of the philosophical truths of life, are best taught by beautiful example of enlightened living in the home. As the child becomes a little older she can be taught that religion means, first of all, living beautifully and nobly, and that a beautiful life is the most acceptable offering to the God of truth and beauty dwelling in all parts of the universe. Under existing conditions we would recommend that the spiritual education of the child remain as a sacred duty of the parent for there are no organizations at the present time that can compare with enlightened parental influence. As the child grows older, she should also be taught that religion is an inner relationship between the person herself and the spirit that dwells in her own heart. No special sectarian religious training should be given to the child. If in later years, the child, grown up to mature judgment, chooses to affiliate with some religious movement, that choice should result from mature judgment and not from parental influence. It is a tragedy to set a child's mind in any theological rut before the child has sufficient individuality to resist this influence and choose its own course of action.

QUESTION—Is it possible to reconcile the idea of a personal God with the impersonal God?

ANSWER—The answer to this question is largely a matter of viewpoint. Creation is God personalized. God is creation impersonalized. If you mean by a personal God an old man with whiskers seated on a golden throne, then such a concept is irreconcilable with philosophy because to philosophers such a concept of deity is purely idolatrous. An idol can

exist in the mind just as surely as it can in wood or stone. Idolatry is the personalization of universal principles. The impersonal God of the wise is that Sovereign Good, inconceivable and immeasurable, which abides in everything, enlivens and supports all things, ensouls existence, and, in the terms of Brahmin metaphysics, extends to the very circumference of space. Justice is impersonal, truth is impersonal, law is impersonal, virtue is impersonal. All the great and noble instances which lift man to the heights of universal achievement are impersonal. Universal survival depends upon the impersonality of that vast Cause which supports the entire scheme of life. Yet the impersonal God is not distant; in fact, is far more intimate than a personal divinity could possibly be. The God of philosophy is not anywhere, but everywhere. At a certain stage of human growth, man achieves to the realization of the insufficiency and inconsistency of a personal God. The mind then demands an impersonal agent at the foundation of action. It is not the purpose of philosophy to reconcile the concept of a personal and an impersonal God; only growth, development, and unfoldment within the individual can result in that state of mind in which the personal divinity fades away, and consciousness discovers that vast and all-sufficient Spirit which abides in the star and the grain of sand.

QUESTION—Can science be reconciled with religion?

ANSWER—Science and religion were identical in origin, are divided in their present state, and will be united again to become identical in their ultimate. Religion is concerned with the moral values of existence; science with the physical values of existence. Every physical value is the outcome of a moral impulse. The Divine Spirit of religion created the material world of science. In the last analysis there is no clear line of demarcation where God leaves off and Nature begins. Divinity in itself is Spirit; divinity in form is Nature. Religion has become crystallized into theological institutions which maintain themselves to a great degree by magnifying points of difference. Science has been crystallized into institutions which have isolated

themselves from the arts and ethics of the race and have dedicated their time and effort to exploration and classification of material phenomena. It will probably be some time before the church and the laboratory will recognize that they are essentially identical. Therefore the only way that we can reconcile science and religion at the present time is in the nature of an enlightened man. A person who has accomplished this reconciliation within himself is properly called a philosopher because he has recognized that the purpose of all knowledge is to discover God, and that from this discovery must arise, finally, systems of thought dedicated to the perfection of man through accumulated knowledge. All opposites of learning are reconciled in the soul of the wise man.

QUESTION—Can past Karma be escaped by present good deeds?

ANSWER—According to the Ancient Wisdom that which is done cannot be undone. No philosophical system worthy of the name would fall into the fallacy of vicarious atonement. Nature's book-keeping system has in it no place for erasures. The motive behind present good deeds should never be to escape past Karma, but rather to prevent the making of more bad Karma. An individual whose present life is filled with efforts to improve character and increase the measure of meritorious action is establishing a solid philosophical foundation of well-being to be enjoyed in future existences. This explains a mystery which confuses many students. A person will say: "All my life I have done good to others and all my life I have suffered misfortune; where is the honesty and integrity of nature?" We bring forward from past existences Karma which must be lived out. As we have injured, so we must suffer. Today we are building Karma for tomorrow, and if our present life is dedicated to enlightened thinking and living we are more apt to enjoy the results thereof in a future existence than in this one. However, very often the good deeds of this life have their reward even here. Not only do we bring forward from the past evil Karma but good Karma; consequently, the average life is a complex

of fortune and misfortune, due to the inconsistencies and ignorance of previous lives.

QUESTION—What is the purpose of baptism?

ANSWER—The sacrament of baptism descended to Christendom from the old pagan Mysteries where it was originally a symbol of purification through water or the cleansing of the body prior to the entrance into a holy place. In the Tabernacle Mysteries of the Jews there was a great laver of purification in the courtyard wherein the priests bathed themselves before donning the vestments of sanctity. Even to this day the Mohammedan mosques have in their courtyards large tanks of water like pools wherein the faithful must wash their feet before participating in the services. The Egyptians recognized two symbolical baptisms: the first of water, symbolizing the purification of the body through strict observance and physical regeneration; the second of fire, symbolizing the enlightenment of the spirit or the descent of consciousness. These baptisms are mentioned in the Gospels. Baptism is a purely symbolical sacrament, a constant reminder that only the pure and the clean are worthy to enter into the knowledge of God. The literal acceptance of baptism as a method of washing out original sin is purely theological. The original sin is ignorance which must be washed out, or the body purified therefrom, by the disciplines of wisdom. Truth purifies the life and fits the one who possesses it to enter into the inner sanctuary of the mystery temple. All of the sacraments are similarly symbolical, having no virtue apart from a course of action which they imply. Baptism should always be regarded as the sacrament of self-purification by means of right thinking, right emotion, and right action.

QUESTION—Would you advise a man to leave civilization who cannot make spiritual progress among a corrupt and evil populace?

ANSWER—It is not possible for anyone to run away from life. There is an old Arabian fable of a man who sought to escape from the evils of existence only to discover that the shadow of them pursued him to the most distant parts of the earth.

At last he learned that this shadow was his own body and that the one evil that no man can escape is himself. Philosophy does not advise truth-seekers to run away from experience, but rather, to use wisdom to face experience more intelligently. These stirring and difficult times in which we live are important to the soul growth of each individual. Philosophy is not merely a studying of books or a thinking of beautiful thoughts. Philosophy is living well in a world which tests the capacity of the individual to live well. Life itself is an initiation into the sanctuary of the Divine Mystery. As neophytes of old were tested as to courage and integrity and wisdom by various trials devised by the priests, so modern truth-seekers are tested by the adversity of life. An individual who cannot achieve where he is cannot achieve anywhere else. Achievement is an inner strength rising up secure and sufficient. Strength comes from action and adversity. The years ahead will be trying years. The steel of the human soul is tempered by the flame of suffering.

QUESTION—How can a drone become useful at fifty? Now that I understand things better I want to be useful.

ANSWER—The first thing for you to do is to forget that you are fifty. Remember that you are an eternal Self; that before the world existed you were, and that after the world ends you will still be. Time is an illusion and greatness rises above time. Many of the greatest men and women of the world accomplished little, if anything, before fifty. When you think of accomplishment in philosophical terms you are thinking of something that transcends time and place and becomes part of a cosmic plan of action, extending through hundreds of lives. Take stock of yourself. What have you learned in the fifty years of the present life? What do you know that others ought to know? What can you do that needs to be done? Remember that in the great craft of the Temple Builders, we all begin as apprentices. Our first task must always be something small and comparatively insignificant. The beginning of wisdom is to do the thing at hand. You may still need to spend time in the perfection of your own disposition, the mastery of

temperament and attitude. You may still have responsibilities to others around you which have not been fulfilled. The example of what you have accomplished and what philosophy has done for you may be a great inspiration to those with whom you come in contact. Think noble thoughts, dream beautiful dreams, labor constructively from day to day, and when you are ready for a greater accomplishment, the work that you are to do will come to hand. The universe always has work for those who are qualified to perform it.

QUESTION—Is it possible to separate spirituality and wisdom? In other words, can a person be spiritually perfect and yet not possess all knowledge?

ANSWER—It is not possible to separate spirituality and wisdom any more than it is possible to prevent a cause from producing its effect. Spirituality actually means that the individual lives or exists upon the level of his spiritual nature or is possessed by the divinity within him. Divinity can have no ignorance within it. God cannot lack anything. Therefore, wisdom is an inevitable correlative of complete spiritual development. The difficulty which has arisen and causes this question lies in the misunderstanding of the nature of spirituality. We are assured in the Scriptures that there is "not one perfect." We know that, at this stage of evolution, it is impossible for a human being to be absolutely perfect either spiritually or physically, for perfection itself is an ultimate, far from our finite state. A person may possess a certain measure of spirituality but even in the wisest this measure is hopelessly incomplete. To the degree that we have spiritual development, to the same degree we must have an

extension of knowledge. There are certain metaphysical groups which promise "cosmic consciousness" as the result of metaphysical exercises. We have met many people claiming to possess this "cosmic consciousness," but a brief conversation with them clearly indicates that they are suffering only from mild hallucination. Cosmic consciousness is all-knowing, and no secret of Nature can be concealed from those who possess even a moderate degree of true illumination. Any person, claiming to possess cosmic consciousness and at the same time manifesting all the limitations and imperfections of the flesh, must be suspected of imposture or delusion.

QUESTION—Do people appreciate only what they pay well for? Please explain the money principle in connection with spiritual instruction.

ANSWER—All neophytes entering the ancient Mystery Temples brought with them valuable gifts or such as they had. Not because the gifts themselves were regarded as payment for instruction, but because only the individual who was willing to sacrifice the best that he had for that which he desired to know was worthy of instruction. Money is a symbol of value in this modern world. The average person prizes it above every other possession. Therefore it is proper and suitable that he should give it as a symbol of sacrifice and appreciation for the priceless treasure which he receives. Any person having much and selfishly refusing to support adequately that which he believes, need not hope for any great measure of illumination. It is not the lack of the gift that will stand in his way but the lack of the spirit of giving.